

"And they shall take unto you pure beaten olive oil for the light." (27:20)

Klal Yisrael is compared to the olive. This is the reason that the oil used for the *Menorah* was to be extracted from an olive. What is the basis of the parallel between the olive and the nature of *Klal Yisrael*? After all, *Klal Yisrael* has been compared to the fruits of many trees. What unique characteristic of the olive is reflected in *Klal Yisrael's* personality? The *Midrash* explains that *Klal Yisrael's* destiny is very much like that of the olive. In order to obtain oil from the olive, it must first be "knocked" off the tree. Afterwards, it is crushed in a mortar and then, finally, ground in a mill. The same is true of *Klal Yisrael*. They are hounded and persecuted by the nations, who beat and afflict them. Yet, they maintain their faith in the Almighty. As a result of their victimization, they turn to Him and perform *teshuvah*.

Chazal's characterization of the olive's "difficult" road to becoming pure oil, as a parallel to *Klal Yisrael's* suffering, which leads to repentance, is very poignant. One particular aspect of this comparison, however, is disturbing. *Chazal* seem to imply that we perform *teshuvah* only **after** having suffered the travail that has unfortunately accompanied us throughout history. Is this true? Do we only repent when we are up against the wall, having suffered mercilessly and having nowhere to go? If this is so, why does Hashem accept *teshuvah* that is inspired by punishment? Is this a sincere repentance?

In responding to these questions, the *Shem M'Shmuel* draws a novel conclusion. He posits, that for the most part, we perform *teshuvah* out of a sense of remorse, acknowledging our transgression without any necessary external "motivation." Nonetheless, Hashem still accepts our repentance which is inspired by the various sufferings we have endured. Why is this? Why do we merit this singular gift? The answer is found in the comparison between *Klal Yisrael* and the olive. The essence of the olive is that pure oil is extracted only through a process which involves beating, pounding and crushing. The pure oil, that special substance, which is to serve as the light of the *Menorah*, is concealed within the outer shell of the olive. Through this process, the core of the olive -- its oil -- is attained.

Klal Yisrael essentially demonstrates a similar trait. Their essence is inherently pure and virtuous. There are *pesol'es*, impurities, however, which surround the inner Jewish personality. The goodness and refinement that is part of every Jew is often obscured by a layer of external unwholesomeness. The dross attitude and somewhat foul behavior which some Jews may exhibit, is only an external impurity which in no way reflects the essential Jew. Through the vehicle of suffering, the "oil", the pure *Yid*, is revealed as he returns to Hashem. This *teshuvah* is not the result of suffering -- it really is an essential part of our character. It is manifest through a process similar to that which the olive undergoes in order to achieve its goal.

The *Midrash* adds two other qualities of olive oil which relate to *Klal Yisrael*. Just as oil and water

cannot mix, but remain exclusive of each other, so, too, are *Klal Yisrael* and the gentile nations not able to merge together. The *Midrash* does not say that they should not mix together, rather it emphasizes that it is impossible for such a union to take place and endure. It goes against the very core of the Jewish psyche.

The *Midrash* mentions one other point in regard to our incapacity to integrate with other nations. When two liquids mix together, one cannot discern which one is on top and which one is on the bottom. Oil is the only substance which when mixed with water always rises to the top. Likewise, when *Klal Yisrael* adheres to its mandate from the Almighty, their pattern of behavior causes them to rise above the other nations. We have before us the "bottom line" concerning our responsibility as Hashem's People: We are to remain segregated from contemporary society to the point that our distinctiveness as a pure and virtuous people -- whose objective is spiritual refinement -- will be obvious. When we act in accordance with the *ratzon* Hashem, will of Hashem, we succeed in reaching our sublime goal.

Alas, when our activities contradict Hashem's prescribed demands, we fail to distinguish ourselves as a *Torah* nation. Hashem tells us, "*You will be for Me a treasure from all the nations*" (*Shemos 19:5*). He is stating that regardless of our actions we will be distinct from our neighbors. The nations will distinguish us either by our virtue or through their virulent anti-Semitism. As the *Chofetz Chaim* once remarked, "*If the Jews do not make Kiddush (if they do not sanctify themselves through their mitzvah performance), then the gentiles will make Havdalah (they will create a separation between the races)*."